

Hobbies

Will it make any cents to save your Lincoln pennies for their copper?

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—I noticed that copper was selling for about \$1.40 a pound (on Oct. 18), not far from its all-time record price. Would it make sense—or cents—to start saving my new Lincoln pennies for their metal content?

C. R., Lansing

A—No. Since 1982 Uncle Sam has made Lincolns out of copper-

plated zinc, a metal composition of 2.5 percent copper and 97.5 percent zinc. Copper prices would have to exceed \$50 a pound before the red metal in a freshly minted Lincoln is worth one cent.

However, some speculators are beginning to pocket their Lincolns issued before 1982, which contain 95 percent copper. The metal in each of those coins is worth a penny when copper sells for about \$1.50 a pound on commodity exchanges.

Q—I was astonished to read in a price guide that a 1926-D silver dollar in "MS-60" condition retails for \$75 while the same coin in "MS-65" goes for \$1,500. Why the great difference? Don't both categories represent "mint state" (uncirculated) coins?

W. F., Elgin

A—For every one uncirculated coin in "MS-65" condition (sometimes called "mint state-choice") a hundred or more exist in "MS-60" ("mint state—typical"). MS-65 coins must have no

more than a few light scratches called "bag marks." Silver dollars in MS-60 usually are marred by several bag marks, a few edge nicks and perhaps some other small—but still noticeable—imperfections.

Q—My family owns special half dollars made for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. My great grandfather worked at the exposition and apparently bought them there for \$1 each. What are they worth now?

G. N., Chicago

A—Prices range from \$15 for a half dollar showing just a trace of wear to at least \$65 for an uncirculated specimen. By the way, exposition workers also sold for \$1 each a small number of commemorative quarters depicting Queen Isabella of Spain. Today, those coins in uncirculated condition go for \$500 and up.

Half dollars greatly outsold quarters at the exposition because at \$1 each people thought that halves were the "better deal."